

North to the Passage

In the year of our Lord, 1616, from the 6 day of June to the 24 day of June, as marked by the old style calendar.

“Perhaps, you should bring more linens,” Goodwife Van Donk suggested to her husband as he made ready with his sea chest. Adrian Van Donk packed his sea chest with only the essentials, as the essentials are all one may fit into a sea chest. It is also the only private space he will have while sailing with Captain Van Joyt this season. He will not fish for cod this summer. Instead, he has signed on for something more adventurous, as Captain Van Joyt intends to find the Northeast Passage leading to the Orient. He finishes his evening porridge, while his wife tends the scullery work, with the same attention to the last few dishes as to the first. “May you return safely home,” she says to him as he heads out the door, and down to the Delft port.

The winds blew from the North by Northwest, sometimes very harshly. Captain Van Joyt was intent on following a course similar to Henry Hudson’s to find the elusive Northern Passage to the Orient. To do this, he must first wait for the winds to shift direction, in order to find a course towards Spitzbergen, and then northeast along the edge of the top of the world. Hudson was unable to find an open waterway (as he ran into a wall of ice) beyond or around Nova Zembla, an island north of Russia. Van Joyt believes there is a way through, as he contends that Hudson didn’t go far enough north, or at least north at the right longitude. Since many in the Dutch East India company had been satisfied that there is no workable passage in that direction, as Hudson had failed to penetrate the ice wall, it was difficult for Captain Van Joyt to get financial backing for his journey. However, some merchants were willing to fund his attempt outside of the Dutch East India Company, of which the legality is uncertain. Nonetheless, it has been done, and the ship is on the North Sea.

The crew's provisions are as follows: 1 loaf of bread and 1 pound of cheese per day for each sailor, 2 pints of small beer (watered down beer) for each sailor per day, 1 pound of salt-pork per week for each sailor. As well, the men have a quantity of ship's biscuits. Brandy wine and nutmeg in small quantities for health are allowed, as these are good remedy for the seasickness. Of course, as to how the Captain and his officers receive their rations, probably much more and of greater quality will be consumed. All have been given good woolens, especially coats, which will be sufficient (one hopes) against the great cold of the northern climes. As many Dutchmen are unaccustomed to travel in those latitudes, many will be quite unhappy throughout the journey. In this way as well, the brandy wine will be of good use.

On this day, Van Donk reflects upon his home, wife, and children again left behind in Delft. By winter, if he survives, he would be home with them once more. He wonders if he has left them sufficient guilders for their livelihood, although the eldest son has begun work on a fishing ship, which will aid the family financially. They will not desire to seek relief, as the service would come from those who insist that the Van Donks' "Papist" ways are in need of reform, and this they are unwilling to do.

As the winds have become more favorable, Captain Van Joyt has ordered the crew to raise sail and make way in a north by northwesterly direction and then to northeast, keeping at all times an eye to the sea for privateers, whether they be Spanish or English or French, or any other hostile nation. The immediate goal is to reach Spitzbergen, home to a northern whaling trade, as whales are seen there in great number. Captain Van Joyt has made arrangements with a Dutch whaling ship to meet there perchance to gain hospitality, and perhaps refill the stores with provisions, even whale meat.

The Spanish, under their Hapsburg rulers, always proclaim title to the Netherlands and are of great concern to Van Joyt. On the high seas, as the Dutch intend to free themselves from Spanish tyranny, the crew must be ever on guard. However, as a Catholic, be it as it may that Van Donk is not persecuted; he is of two minds about the prospect of Dutch

liberation. Of course, he would not speak so in public, and the Netherlands is a free and tolerant country for the most part.

In some weeks or so, they will be distant from the shores of Scandinavia. Spitzbergen is a northern island off the coast. Van Donk has heard a great deal of the midnight sun, and looks forward to experiencing this wonder.

Professor Van Klujtk is an oddity among men. Whereas many important geographers remain on land, relying on the charts of navigators and the maps of previous others, Professor Van Klujtk has decided to experience the objects of his maps in a way others might not. There was a certain Dutch mapmaker who was forbidden from leaving the Netherlands for fear his expertise would fall into the hands of enemies. Professor Van Klujtk is not of this level, but a learned man indeed, fully versed in the Latin tongue, which is the language of scholars. He may not be able to keep his sea legs, though. Already he has consumed much brandy wine against the seasickness. Last any man did see him, he was sucking half a nutmeg, this being a cure against the seasickness. He is a very fat man also. His condition does not seem suited to the endeavor he has undertaken. Van Donk suspects he'll be very thin when they arrive back in Delft, if they do.

The ship, the North Wind, being of average size and design, was fortified with extra planking, much in the same way one of Captain Hudson's was. The entire length from aft to stern could not exceed 100 paces. The captain's quarters being best, are not of the greatest comfort, with the other men in cabins two to a space, sufficient for themselves and their sea chests, the sea chests being the only vestige of privacy a sailor may have.

Van Donk shares quarters, little more than a small space below deck, with Jan Van Slyke, a sailor he has known for many years from times they both served on fishing vessels off the coast of Delft. Quiet and taciturn, he once saved Van Donk from falling very likely to his death off one of those ships during a storm, therefore, he trusts him with his life.

In the evening, and this one is no different, the men tell tales of their journeys - real or imagined. Abel Van Curler is well traveled upon the seas, with endless tales to tell, some which might be true. Here now is the tale Van Curler told that evening, as best as can be related.

The icy giants and Champlain's hunt for the Gougou bird.

It was before the Frenchmen founded Quebec, in the days when Samuel Champlain and a handful of men occupied their habitation at Port Royal. In these early years of New France, the colonists (being Papists and Protestants both) would celebrate, or in truth better endure, the long, dark, and cold winters of Canada. To do this, they would feast one another upon fish and stag and all kinds of food, in turn, and call this an Order of Good Cheer. One of them, a lawyer by the name of Lescarbot, even performed a play for the enjoyment of these residents of New France, called a Theater of Neptune.

Now, it may have been in that winter, although of this one cannot be certain, that Champlain learned of the Gougou bird from the Indians of the land. Thus hearing of this, he decided that he would hunt this creature, perhaps to bring to the table upon his turn at the Order of Good Cheer. So, the fearless Champlain took his matchlock musket and went in search of this bird.

As some may remember, Champlain was a great mapmaker. This did not prevent him from proceeding to lose his way in the search for the Gougou bird. As the evening came upon him, as well as new snows, he realized he was uncertain where he had come to. With the fresh snows, his native guides, two young men who had come with him in search of this elusive (if not illusory) prey, had become lost as well. The three of them stood lost in the wild country when one of the guides began to tell Champlain that he thought they were not far from a country where the men are ten feet tall and made canoes from the ice. Upon hearing of this, Champlain asked for further clarification, for he had never heard of such a thing before. One guide answered, "There are men to the north that

eat only raw meat, and as well being giants, they know not of bark or hollowed canoes such as ours, but only giant canoes of ice. They will surely eat us raw, and yet we will not be enough to fill their bellies, as their bellies are quite big as well.”

This was enough to make Samuel Champlain even more curious. He was curious of the lands and its peoples at any rate. Now, he would be compelled to press on, hoping to find one of these ice giants.

Against the advice and the wishes of his two guides, the three continued forth through the snow. The French and their Indian friends would not be able to journey out in the winter without the rackets they put onto their feet. Without these, they would be swallowed up by the snow before any ice giant could swallow them.

Before they could travel very far, evening was upon them. The guides were less able at night, as they used the sun as a universal compass. The two guides became more fearful. Champlain was undeterred. He was so intent upon the search for the ice giants, he almost forgot about the Gougou bird. Then, they heard a sound resembling that of the Gougou bird. By this time, it was too dark to see, thus Champlain would hardly be able to aim even if he knew which direction the sound were coming from. Again, there was the sound, but this time more familiar. “C-H-A-M-P-L-A-I-N!” came the faint cry. “The ice giants know your name, Champlain,” the one guide spoke fearfully. Again the cry came, but this time even more familiar. “Champlain, we thought you’d lost yourself for good,” said Lescarbot as he appeared from the forest. “Come, it is a fish day, so we will eat the four-legged fish, the beaver,” said Lescarbot with his usual friendliness.

As they somehow had made a circle back to near Port Royal, it was easy for Lescarbot to lead them home. Meanwhile, in the distance, an ice giant’s belly began to growl. “I bet the Frenchmen taste good,” said the giant as he tightened his belt and went northward, eating raw moose instead.

As morning broke, the weather, calm until then, turned stormy. Van Joyt reckoned the ship to be no more than 100 leagues from the coast of Norway. The North Sea can be rough in any season. Van Donk was ordered to the crow's nest to look out for land, or Lord forbid - privateers. All he could perceive was rain and wind and fog. He had heard tales of floating islands of ice. Many ships were sunk by these wondrous hazards. He did not close his eyes for a moment.

Over time, the rain turned to snow, and the wind blew right through him. His fingers and toes became numb. Yet, he was still inclined to close his eyes, momentarily losing consciousness, and then regaining his wits. This went on for several minutes until the sun broke through the clouds and the wind and the snow stopped. In the distance, very faintly, he could discern the vague outline, more like an amorphous form, moving slightly slower and away. Through his spyglass he could see that this form was a ship, flying the St. George's cross, the markings of England. "Ship Ho! Several leagues fore! English!" yelled he with great excitement. The men made ready on deck. Captain Van Joyt gave orders to set the ship to a more northerly course, out of range of the English ship. He knew not if they were friend or foe, privateers or friendly fishermen, or perhaps explorers like himself, but he wasn't in the mood to find out. The ship was set on course to climb in latitude northward and hopefully away and around the English ship.

The crew sailed out of sight of the English ship. Professor Van Klujtk studied his charts and maps. "I fear if we climb too far north, we will have the same problem Captain Hudson did when he ran into the ice sheet," warned the professor. "Yes. I am aware of this possibility," the Captain said calmly. "We will come to between the 60th and 70th degree of latitude, and then we will set a course due east; from there we should be able to navigate to Spitzbergen."

As the long afternoon turned into evening, illuminated by strange twilight, Van Donk realized that the nights were getting shorter, and soon they might be dwelling in perpetual daylight. Would this mean that the men would be expected to be awake more? Van Donk

did not in the least feel fatigued. Once again the men gathered to listen to stories told by Van Curler. Here is the story related to the captivated sailors upon this evening.

The Jesuit and the Manitou.

A Jesuit Father and his laymen, for the greater glory of God, found themselves evangelizing to the Indians in the New World, particularly in Canada among the Algonquin nations. Although these people did offer great hospitality to the Father and his men, certainly the comforts of their native France were lacking. Besides, this particular group of Indians was more nomadic than some others the Fathers had been aware of. This was of no consequence because the good Fathers (and their laymen) are taught to endure any hardship for the greater glory of God.

The Jesuit Fathers are very learned men and often will record in their journals the superstitions and customs of those they are attempting to bring the faith. In fact, this certain Father had become quite articulate in the tongue of these Algonquin. This was often the case in this part of the New World, as it was thought best to know the language and the customs of their hosts as a vehicle of bringing the faith, and thus saving them from eternal damnation.

One belief the Father learned of was the Manitou, a kind of spirit. Of course the Father's work was to discredit the concept of the Manitou, and encourage a belief in Christianity, although from the Papist point of view. Often, it was thought the devil was strong and this may be a reason for the deception of these people. Nonetheless, the Fathers relied mainly on arguments based on logic (they were some of the most learned men in the world) to bring these Indians into the everlasting life of Christ.

One night, while making camp during a hunting excursion, the father heard a sound he took to be footsteps upon twigs or sticks, the ground not yet completely blanketed in snow. He turned to look, but nobody was there. Reclining, he attempted to take his rest for the night. However, every time he drifted off into sleep, he was awoken by the same sound of footsteps on twigs or sticks. Each time the Father looked for an intruder, none was to be found.

Finally, the Father was able to fall asleep, a deep sleep that allowed him to dream. He dreamt of an Indian shaman who was no taller than three feet, taunting him with noise and magic. The shaman exclaimed, “You are the ruin of my people! You bring death in your pouch! I am the Manitou, as old as earth itself, and I will not be replaced by your sky god!” To which the Father replied, still dreaming, “You are a demon, sent by the devil to keep me from my work. By the grace of the Lord, you will be destroyed.” The wind grew colder and stronger. The Father awoke. Strange noises came from the distance, but then it was dawn, and all was as if this new world was a paradise – full of everything that was needed for survival and joy.

The Father was not heard from again, and other Fathers were sent to find their missing comrade. The Indians claim he was taken by the Manitou, and that is their belief even to this very day.

In the year of our Lord, 1616, from the 24th day of June to the 3rd day of July, as marked by the old style calendar.

As the mapmaker had warned, the ship befell the fate warned of by Hudson and many others. It became bound to the ice, and unable to navigate. The captain, although he would rather have pressed north, decided he must turn directly south, and hope for the

best. Otherwise, the ship with the crew aboard might be crushed by the ever-thicker accumulation of ice – perhaps the crew would freeze to death before that. This being done, the storm none-the-less raged all around. The crew could only wait and hope that faith (whether it be Catholic or Protestant) would see them through.

With the ship secured and the storm raging, the captain himself realized the need for diversion from the current state. He gathered the men and began to regale them of tales of long ago – a story that would give the men confidence they would survive. He told the story of Pytheas the Greek as he had come to understand it, the implication being that if a Greek sailor from ancient times could survive such hardships, this crew should calm their jitters with a bit of rum, and simply wait out the storm. Here is the story as it came to the men through the medium of the captain.

Pytheas and his Ancient Voyage

In ancient times, there was a Greek sailor who decided to explore what was beyond the “sea in the middle of the earth.” He sailed beyond the Pillars of Hercules and into a northern sea. He may have been searching for what the Greeks called “Thule” or the most northerly place on earth. When he made report of his incredible journeys it was hardly believed that he had traveled as he claimed. What has come down to us is known only from other writers, who (skeptical as they were) commented on what Pytheas had written, there being no extant journal of Pytheas.

Pytheas, although being Greek in the time of Alexander the Great, lived on the Mediterranean coast of France. This is where he began his journeys. Most likely in a ship very meager in comparison to ours, he managed to sail to England and Ireland. He spoke of the tin that the inhabitants of those isles harvested and traded with the people who likely lived across the Channel. He spoke of the Celtic people and their customs, such as painting their bodies. In fact, he may have traded for tin and amber – both of mysterious origin in these days.

He continued on, and reached what came to be called “Thule” by the ancient world. It is thought that this was the island of Iceland. He continued into a sea of wondrous congealed ice and fog. To Pytheas, this surely must have seemed like the edge of the world. As he sailed out beyond the known limits of the earth, having already sailed beyond the sea in the middle of the earth, his clothes were not adequate protection against the wind and the wet cold of the northern sea. He made his way back to Iceland, where after bathing in the hot springs, found himself in better health than before. A good thing, as the island is known for mystic dwarves and elves, and perhaps Pytheas may not have been welcome upon their island. Nonetheless, he survived to return home and tell his tale. However, many later writers had a difficult time believing his story.

Many of the men, including Adrian, returned to their bunks and fell asleep. Despite the damp cold, Adrian fell into a deep sleep and dreamt. He dreamt of an island he had once visited in the Pacific with warm sunlight and temperate breezes. The island was sparsely inhabited by natives, most finding the Europeans to be a curiosity more than anything. The island was replete with strange tropical fruits, which the natives shared abundantly with the visiting sailors. Over the span of a few weeks, however, many of the natives became mysteriously sick – and many became suspicious of their guests. It was then that the captain wisely decided to sail on away from that island.

In his dream, Adrian woke up on the isolated island. The ship was in ruins. He was alone, as nobody from his ship seemed to survive the shipwreck. In the distance he could hear strange sounds, like drumming and chanting. Around him, men he didn't recognize as native or European were drinking a concoction of rum and tropical fruit juice. Some of them were obviously drunk. Half-naked native women came into focus, as they danced and chanted around the drunken men. In the distance, perhaps a hundred paces or more away, a pot boiled over a large fire. Flames and smoke puffed as water boiled over into the fire. The smell of putrid fish filled Adrian's nose, and one of the drunken men began to vomit and roll around on the sandy beach. “You've been away too long,” said the

drunken man as he got up on his feet, only to fall forward on his face. Native women came closer as they danced, seeming to taunt the drunken men. They smiled in Adrian's direction, but an uneasy feeling crept over him the closer they came. "Do you remember the cure for the scurvy we gave you?" one woman oddly asked. "You will need this again when the winds blow cold on another journey," said another woman. They kept dancing and taunting until Adrian himself felt drunk and sick. He began to vomit on the beach, with the strange sensation of having drunk the rum concoction himself – and yet no memory of this.

Momentarily, his dream transported him back to the cold, icy north. He was rather hobbled and rickety, having pain in joints. His knee was especially problematic, and he walked with great effort and pain. His gums were bleeding and some of his teeth had fallen out. The Sun began to shine, but the temperature remained frigid. He was seated at a table with other sailors attempting to eat a bland porridge of some sort. Then, he realized he was on the ship again, but the motion indicated a calm sea. He looked again, and realized it wasn't at sea, but at anchor near a large island covered in ice and snow. As this situation calmed him, and the dream was becoming more like a nightmare until this point, he fell into a deep sleep with the dream fading away only to be jerked into the waking world by a sudden and hard cracking sound accompanied by an all too perceptible jolt. The men were already on deck scurrying and screaming over the sound of harsh winds and a cold gale.

As strange twilight turned to daylight, the gale subsided, and a few leagues in front of the ship, one could discern the outline of a body of land – perhaps an arctic island. The Captain and the geographer were arguing over what body of land this could possibly be. There were no signs of activity by ships, European or otherwise. There was no trace of habitation to be discerned readily, but certainly the island (if it was an island) would have to be reconnoitered more thoroughly before that conclusion could be reached.

Van Donk was ordered to take two other men, Van Barrents and Crueler, to go ashore and attempt to ascertain the nature of the piece of land. They took one of the ship's boats and rowed their way to land. The way was difficult, as it was necessary to navigate around ice patches floating in the ocean. A short distance from the land, the men had to walk carefully across frozen ocean until they were satisfied they were safe on dry land.

"It is thought to be an island," proclaimed Van Donk. "We must prove that to be so for certain and find any fresh water, as well as any evidence of wealth the Netherlands might benefit from."

General Serge Sarkavski watched nervously as the test plans came to fruition. Everything was in place on the island of Novaya Zemlya for the nuclear test. In "Zone B" there would be the first nuclear tests underground on the island. The island had been claimed by Russia many years ago, perhaps centuries, and now was property of the USSR.

"Is everything set?" the general asked his top scientists. "Yes Comrade," replied Tankin Tanikski, head of the nuclear project for today's experiment. "Good." Then, the blast threw mushroom clouds into the air, with incredible force as the earth split apart. "Still not as big as our American Comrades," commented Serge. "But big enough to be frightening to them."

Once on the island, Van Donk noticed a flash of light, pale though it was. There seemed to be the after-effects of some sort of explosion, and a strange buzzing sound filled his immediate space. He and his men were sucked forward into this buzzing. As each seemed to dissipate following the other, while shock filled each man in his turn. There was an

abandoned European style cabin on their left as they disappeared into space, probably the work of Hugh Willoughby, who explored this island before them.

“Where are we,” the other two men asked Von Donk. “I do not know,” was the puzzled reply.

In the year of our Lord uncertain.

The men did not fully materialize. They seemed to be apparitions. The buzzing sound was still prevalent, and becoming louder. To their left now, the cabin seemed to radiate light and heat. Outside stood a gruff looking man. “Who goes there?” shouted the strange man. “We should ask the same. We believed this island to be uninhabited.” “I am Captain High Willoughby. My ship is stuck in the ice away from here.” “We did not see any other ship,” said Adrian. “Well, you must not have looked well enough. I started with three ships. We were looking for a passage to Russia and the Orient.” “Same as us, then,” replied Adrian. “Well, you might as well come in out of the cold.”

Inside the house, the glow was everywhere. The fire, however, seemed dim. Yet, it was very warm inside. All around were strange objects, some like elongated cannon balls. Others were metal objects of a quality never seen by the men. “This island is full of wondrous stuff,” said Willoughby. “Look here.” Willoughby pulled out a giant piece of metal that seemed to be hot glowing, but was cool to the touch. “I found this about 50 paces from here to the north.” As the men came closer to look, they began to dissipate more again.

Inside the dwelling there was nothing but the light from the hearth, yet the fire became brighter and brighter. The men began to lose their form entirely. Hugh Willoughby seemed further and further in the distance. “Quick, let’s get out of here and back to the ship!” yelled Adrian. The men ran outside, and soon, the snow began to fall. The wind

blew around them, and the snow became deeper by the second. “I do not think we will ever get off this island,” one of the men said. “I believe you might be right,” Adrian replied.

Letter from the Company to the Van Donk Family

“We regret to inform you that Adrian Van Donk has been lost at sea.....”